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Lobbyist says Dababneh masturbated in front of her

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Lobbyist Pamela Lopez, left, speaks out during a press conference on Monday, saying that Assemblyman Matt Dababneh masturbated in front of her last year. A second woman, Jessica Yas Barker, right, says she also experienced sexual harassment from him.

Assembly to hire investigator as two women allege harassment

BY ALEXEI KOSEFF, TARYN LUNA AND CHRISTOPHER CADELAGO
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A Sacramento lobbyist said Monday that Assemblyman Matt Dababneh cornered her in a hotel bathroom in Las Vegas last year and masturbated in front of her.

The explosive allegation, which comes more than six weeks after lobbyist Pamela Lopez first publicly discussed the incident without naming the perpetrator, prompted an Assembly investigation and a sharp rebuke from Dababneh, a Los Angeles Democrat.

"This is a moment. This is a moment of collective action," Lopez said in a press conference at her Q Street office. "I find strength in that collective action, and I find strength in their numbers. I want to stand with them and show that there is a path to stepping forward and seeking justice."

Dababneh denied the allegation in a statement released by The Rose Group, a Santa Monica public relations firm.

"I affirmatively deny that this event ever happened – at any time," he said. "I am saddened by this lobbyist's effort to create this falsehood and make these inflammatory statements, apparently for her own self-promotion and without regard to the reputation of others. I look forward to clearing my name."

At an Assembly hearing on sexual harassment prevention last week, Lopez, 35, said she was afraid that going public could hurt her ability to make a living. She is a partner in K Street Consulting, a public affairs and governmental relations company.

Dababneh, 36, represents an Assembly district encompassing part of the San Fernando Valley, where he was elected in a November 2013 special election. He chairs the influential Banking and Finance Committee, and often carries legislation on animal welfare issues.

But Lopez said she changed her mind after listening to Assembly Rules Committee chairman Ken Cooley at the hearing last week, where he urged women to report sexual harassment and promised to put victims first and protect their safety.

Lopez told The Bee she submitted a letter detailing the Dababneh incident to the Assembly Rules Committee on Monday morning, as a "test case."

"I don't have faith, necessarily, but I have hope that there will be some serious reforms in the process and that it will support me," she said. "I'm still really scared."

She said that Dababneh, through his attorney, "has tried to silence me by threatening to sue me for defamation if I persisted in reporting this assault."

Cooley said in a statement that the Assembly will hire an outside investigator to handle the complaint.

"Since the allegation is criminal in nature, Ms. Lopez is encouraged to contact law enforcement as well," he said.

A second woman who formerly worked in U.S Rep. Brad Sherman's district office in the San Fernando Valley, where Dababneh was the district director, joined Lopez at the press conference, saying she was also harassed by Dababneh.

Jessica Yas Barker said that during her year-and-a-half in the office, Dababneh repeatedly commented on her looks and appearance, including telling her not to dress like "such a lesbian," and often regaled her with

SEE DABABNEH, 9A

VIDEO
Watch Pamela Lopez describe the alleged assault and read her statement at **sacb.ee/c2dt**

Lawmakers call for statewide emergency system

BY ANGELA HART
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When a fast-moving wildfire flared up in Lake County early on Oct. 9, emergency officials quickly issued an emergency alert, blasting thousands of cell phones with mandatory evacuation orders and notifying area residents that they could soon be trapped by flames.

Just south, in neighboring Sonoma County, a series of wildfires that ignited the previous day were burning whole neighborhoods. Local emergency officials had decided against sending out mass alerts, citing concern over creating confusion and chaos on critical roadways. Officials also questioned what good it would do, with widespread damage to cellular and power infrastructure.

The Lake County wildfire, though less destructive than other nearby blazes, killed no one, state fire officials believe. The Sonoma County fires killed 24 people, with an additional 20 deaths in Napa, Mendocino and Yuba counties.

Could the response employed by Lake County emergency officials have saved lives if similar tactics were used nearby?

"It very well could have," said state Sen. Mike McGuire, D-Healdsburg, whose North Coast district includes large portions of Sonoma, Lake and Mendocino counties.

McGuire and a dozen other California lawmakers on Monday said the state must take action to improve early warning systems during wildfires, earthquakes, floods and other emergencies.

"I think it's time for this state to seriously explore a statewide standard for emergency alerts," McGuire said during the state Legislature's first oversight hearing of California's alert systems since the October fires – ranked as the most destructive in the state's history. He said Lake County likely benefited from past experience with deadly wildfires in re-

SEE ALERTS, 2A

Trump scales back 2 national monuments drawing praise, protests

BY JOSH DAWSEY AND JULIET EILPERIN
Washington Post

SALT LAKE CITY

President Donald Trump on Monday drastically scaled back two national monuments established in Utah by his Democratic predecessors, the largest reduction of public lands protection in U.S. history.

Trump's move to shrink the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments by more than 1.1 million acres and more than 800,000 acres, respectively, immediately sparked an outpouring of praise from conservative lawmakers as well as activists' protests outside the White House and in Utah. The changes plunge the Trump administration into uncharted legal territory, as no president has sought to modify monuments established under the 1906 Antiquities Act in more than half a century.

His decision removes about 85 percent of the designation of Bears Ears and nearly 46 percent of that for Grand Staircase-Escalante, land that potentially could now be leased for energy exploration or opened for specific activities such as motorized vehicle use.

Trump told a rally in Salt Lake City that he came to "reverse federal overreach" and took dramatic action "because some people think that the natural resources of Utah should be controlled by a small handful of very distant bureaucrats located in Washington. And guess what? They're wrong."

"They don't know your land, and truly, they don't care for your land like you do," he said. "But from now on, that won't matter."

The two proclamations are the first in a series of major

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